

Not Your Standard Deal: OPeNDAP's Positive Experience with NASA ESDS SPG

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15 June 2005



Overall Impressions

- Process was more stable than I expected
- Process took longer than I anticipated
- Resulting document has turned out to be more valuable than our group expected
- The process had unanticipated affects on other efforts within the group

Process Improvements

- Set of target milestones with duration estimates.
 - These would help scheduling within our group and...
 - I think they would help people implementing the protocol while it's still a 'draft.'
- Definition of what goes into the Errata.
 - This would help decide the 'Yet Another Draft Document' question.
- Document templates.
 - Since PDF is the canonical form for the documents, direct support for Latex, ..., would be a good thing.

Pros & Cons

- Time spent solidifying already developed technology
- Foundation layer of our projects more accessible to others
- Lends credibility to our work (via peer-review)
- Reduces risk for other groups in adopting the protocol (if OPeNDAP goes away).
- Time not spent developing new ideas
- Risk: Start with a technology that's too young and its shortfalls might eclipse its strengths
- Risk: If NASA ends support for the SPG, standards will be orphaned.

Benefits of Participation

- A small group cannot develop a high quality specification without external review. The SPG provides a critical service because the process is too expensive for such a group.
- By choosing to vet and publish standards for established technologies, the SPG standards carry extra weight. It is likely they will (continue to) be implemented and adopted.
- Having a high quality document benefits development teams (reducing costs do to errors, miscommunication, et cetera).
- The nature of the standards increase the likelihood of more independent implementation, which will strengthen the individual implementations and lead to high quality (demand-based) improvements.

Conclusion

- Standards are notorious on several levels; this process has gone very smoothly.
- The OPeNDAP Board or Directors singled this activity out as one of the most important for the past year. They felt that the benefits were well worth the (low) costs.